3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

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to do except hunting, fishing, building or repairing the houses, or practising some craft: their chief occupation in this time is idling about, seeing friends, dancing, etc. But in the rainy season all people, including women and children, are engaged in farm-work; during those months they are really hard-working.

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To give an opinion on the mental abilities of the natives would require a long and intimate acquaintance with them. From my personal experiences I can only say that I feel an admiration for the few men who have been working with me during my studies. They were never tired in giving explanations, in procuring folklore and helping me to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language. Whenever their store of tales was exhausted, they used to go to their families in the evening to get new informations; historical reports being provided by old men, chiefly from those belonging to the royal family, while for stories, riddles, etc. women were the best source. Though we were at work day after day, which meant for them a considerable and quite unaccustomed mental exertion, they never showed any unwillingness, but were really interested in the work. I consider them as intelligent, quick-witted people. This is confirmed by their folklore. They have a decided sense and predilection for historical traditions, being the only black people of the Eastern Sudan who are able to trace back their own history for centuries. The fact that they have had, up to the European occupation of the country, a kingdom with a well-ordered provincial government, shows no doubt certain political capabilities.

II. OCCUPATIONS.

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HOUSEBUILDING

Vide page 96 and 97.

The homestead is surrounded by a fence of dura-stalks. The villages are built in a circle, the open space in the centre containing sometimes a meeting-house for the men, and a small, narrow hut which is dedicated to Nyikang or some other ancient king.

AGRICULTURE

Vide page 99.

CATTLE-BREEDING

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[556]

The favourite occupation of the Shilluks is cattle-breeding; cattle mean wealth and a social position, while the cultivation of the ground is merely the means of procuring daily food. Besides cattle goats and sheep are kept. The number of cattle has in earlier times undoubtedly been much larger than it is to-day, the desire of robbing cattle being one of the chief reasons for the raids of Arabs, Turks, and other enemies. The cattle census of 1903 showed 12173 head of cattle and 63473 sheep and goats, which is very little compared with that of the Dinkas. But the number of cattle is increasing now.

The cattle are of the zebu race, with a hump behind the neck; they are tall,

19: Howell & Thomson E, G-5 (1943-1944) 1946
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

123 643 Our task has not been easy. It was almost impossible—particularly during the more public events which were attended by thousands of Shilluk - to observe all the individual ritual acting which occurred, often simultaneously. The scene was set from Kwomo to Tonga—a distance of about 160 miles—and the whole tribe entered into the spirit of the occasion. Moreover, it was not seemly to interrogate the performers while the ceremonies were going on. Thus, while in many cases we observed behaviour, ritual and emotional 129 attitudes displayed by individuals or crowds, we were not able to 643 interrupt to demand an explanation from the participants. Most of the onlookers knew little more than we did, though the events had to them an accepted meaning in the context of tradition stamped on [88] their minds from birth, but only vaguely so, for Shilluk tradition rests in the minds of the elders. In a series of ceremonies, which are [614] carried out by many clans each with its peculiar duties to perform, each man knows with any degree of accuracy only the part that he must play. Subsequent interrogation was often sterile. Sometimes the Shilluk do not know, sometimes tradition exists only as such and the meaning is lost in antiquity. Interest after the event--at the time roused to a high pitch of emotional excitement--soon dies down. Answers were therefore often evasive, contradictory and even misleading.

128 643 Subsequent events, prolonged leave in England, accumulated administrative duties, etc., have made it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue our investigations. The installation of Anei Kur is three years past, and the results of our observations must be published now at the risk of criticism. We have omitted in many cases to explain fully the meaning of the varied forms of ritual, and failed to include a full description of the origin and significance of the many sacred and material objects used. At this stage of our investigations it would be misleading to speculate too deeply into those things about which our knowledge is far from complete.

643 It is not easy to draw conclusions, but certain facts are abundantly clear :-

21: Mutwakil U-5 (1946) 1947 F323 Shilluk F323

TYPES OF DURA USED BY SHILLUK AND DINKA

by Hasan Mutwakil

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Introduction

In making this note I am quite aware of the fact that I have been in the Upper Nile Province for so short a time that I cannot guarantee its accuracy in every particular. It is the outcome of personal experience and observation and enquiries made among Shilluks and settled northerners (*Gellâba*), and should be accepted as such. If, however, in the course of future investigation any doubt arises with regard to my information, I will do my best to correct or confirm what I now venture to put on record.

Groups and Varieties

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1. *Lwalli* is the Shilluk name for the 'early red dura.'

This dura is early in the sense that it is sown earlier than other crops. But it includes quick-maturing varieties as well as comparatively late-maturing varieties.

The word 'red' is not a precise description, as the colour of the grain is by no means uniform. The dura exhibits a large mixture of colours from dark red to white, most probably the result of crossing. All these colours can be produced in one field, often from plants in the same hole.

Lwalli includes a large number of sub-varieties, of which the following are more common :—

Toro, a tall plant, late-maturing, seeds pink
Otheth „ „ „ „
Nyalwalding, dwarf, quick-maturing
Nyakino, dwarf, quick-maturing, seeds dark red.
Wer Jal Nyigara, dwarf, quick-maturing

Nyanwar,	„	„	„	
Nyafirwat,	„	„	„	
Nyanbar,	„	„	„	
Nyachogo,	„	„	„	White
Yonongo,	„	„	„	Brownish red
Chiat alij,	„	„	„	

[p. 164]

22: Howell E-5 (1951) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

The Death and Burial of *reth* Dak *and* FADIET OF THE SHILLUK

By P. P. Howell

THE following observations are intended to amplify previous accounts of the death and burial of Shilluk Kings.[1] I was not able on this occasion to follow the ceremonies in detail, for the death of a Shilluk *reth* and the installation of his successor is carried out over a long period with a mass of ritual observance. I attended some of the ceremonies, had conversations with some of the participants later and am also indebted to Mr. J. L. Baker, then District Commissioner of the Shilluk, for much of the information recorded here.

I have assumed in the reader some knowledge of previous publications on the subject. In broad outline the procedure followed may be summarized as follows:—

(1) Immediately after his death the body of the *reth* is carried to a village with which he has had previous close association and is there ceremonially immured in a special hut. It should remain there for a period which varies between a few months and over a year.

(2) Meanwhile, the new *reth* is elected in the traditional manner by an electoral college of hereditary chiefs and, unless internal conflicts follow over the choice, begins to prepare himself for his installation.

(3) The remains of the late *reth* are then removed from the hut and carried to the village of his birth or adoption, and there buried in in the house formerly occupied by him. Full mourning ceremonies in which a large proportion of the population play their part follow.

(4) Preparations for the installation, involving all sorts of preliminary ritual observance and ceremonies, continue and the final stages are timed to take place after the harvest and before the rains.

(5) The formal installation then takes place and consists of the march of Nyikang (the original *reth* and culture-hero of the Shilluk who is represented in effigy) from Akurwa to Fashoda;

[1] See in particular: Munro, P., *Installation of the Reth of the Chol, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. I, 1918; Howell, P. P., and Thomson, W. P. G., *The Death of a Reth of the Shilluk and the Installation of his Successor, S.N. & R.*, Vol. XXVII, 1946; Thomson, W. P. G., *Notes on the Death of a Reth of the Shilluk, S.N. & R.*, Vol. XXIX, 1948. Also Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, Frazer Lecture, 1948, Cambridge University Press.

24: Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

4. *Jago Atarwel* (Fadit Division)
5. *Awanpiwok Akwei* (Dorwok Division)
6. *Jago Ongwany* (Mamma Division)
7. *Jago Okwak* (Fanyidwai Division)
8. *Awanpiwok Dhakwan* (Nyijak Division)
9. *Awanpiwok Yamon* (Lul Division)
10. *Awanpiwok Gony* (Malakai Division)[1]

I informed them of three candidates who on various grounds were unacceptable to the Government and left them. On the night of the 13th matters were hastened because *reth* Kur was summoned by the Electoral College and marched with his followers to Akwehai to await daylight and formal acceptance. I arrived at 7.30 a.m. on the morning of the 14th and found the new *reth* already in Fashoda which he had entered after stepping over a sheep ordered to the ground[2]. I waited for two hours while certain rituals (*bwor*) were performed, including the making of new fire by rubbing fire-sticks together (*yor mur*), water boiled over the fire and used for the shaving of the *reth's* head. The chiefs—a very large cross-section of Shilluk society, for only *Awanpiwok* Deng of Apuc, and the chiefs of Tonga and Fanyikang had not arrived—together with the men of Kodok and others present shouted their allegiance and a black ox (no entire animal could be found) was speared, examined (looking dazed for about five minutes and then fell on its left side (a good omen) just by the royal cattle byre. The chiefs dispersed on the 13th, leaving the *reth* to commemorate for a few days in his father's home, while Fashoda was being organised to house a new *reth* after being deserted for several weeks owing to *reth* Dak's absence in hospital."

Mr. Baker has also remarked that in the list of chiefs given above, only the first three are essential at this meeting. "The others are truly only witnesses or at most proposers of candidates." Thomson, speaking of the election of *reth* Dak, says "it was clearer to me than before that the choice rests entirely with the chiefs of Got Dhiang and Got Nyikang'." "I doubt whether even the chief of the *bwowth* (*jago jang bwowth*) has any influence: he and the other members of the College have only to listen to a decision."[3]

I had not the time to attend all the events or to investigate all the aspects of the preparations which led up to the installation on this occasion. Mr. Thomson and I between us had been able to cover much of the ground on the accession of *reth* Awei. Mr. Thomson was able to add further details on the installation of *reth* Dak. It must be remembered, however, that the death of one *reth* and the installation of another takes not less than a year to complete and that the ceremonies are set over a wide field from one end of Shilluk

[1] See Howell & Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 31-33.

[2] The significance of this act (*shoth*) is discussed in a previous article: S.N.R. Vol. 33 Part I.

[3] Howell & Thomson, *ibid.* p. 75.

[4] Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 152.

24 Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

country to the east, a distance of about one hundred and sixty miles. Here, with the help of Mr. J. L. Baker and Mr. J. O. Udal, I can only supplement our previous accounts by recording actual observations made on this occasion with additional information from Shilluk who attended. Mr. Baker was unfortunately transferred to another district a few days before the final ceremonies.

Before describing the events as they occurred on this occasion, it will be as well to summarize the main features of the ceremonies according to traditional practice. In the installations of the various Shilluk *reths* of which we have records there has been no great deviation from the general principles and what differences are found concern the actual timing and minor elaborations in ritual.

The rôle of Nyikang

We have already seen that when the soul of Nyikang has finally left the person of the late *reth*, he appears in effigy at Akurwa. This effigy, together with that of Dak, son of Nyikang, made of bamboo and sackcloth surmounted by huge plumes of ostrich feathers[1], sometimes appear in public during the lifetime of a *reth*: normally they are dormant and their principal functions are concerned with the installation ceremonies. Nyikang is everywhere, but for the moment his personality is concentrated in this effigy. To the Shilluk the effigy is Nyikang, so that in all our accounts we have always spoken of Nyikang meaning both the effigy and the spirit: the two are indistinguishable. Throughout the ceremonies the effigies are treated by the Shilluk with a mixture of hilarity and dread; mixed emotions which are always apparent. When all the preparations have been completed, Nyikang and Dak are carried forth from the shrine at Akurwa and beat the bounds of Shilluk country to the north. They are carried by men of the *kwe* Nyikang and surrounded by a bodyguard of the same clan armed with whips to clear the people from their path. They then march southwards to Fashoda.

The flight of the reth to Debalo

As soon as the *reth* hears that Nyikang draws near, he abandons the capital and retires to the village of Debalo a few miles south of Aweyjar, the watercourse which is the boundary between the two ceremonial divisions of Shilluk country, Gol Dhiang (the north) and Gol Nyikang (the south). These divisions are of great importance in the installation ceremonies and on other occasions have no real significance. The *reth* is always supported in the conventional hostilities which follow by the occupants of Gol Nyikang, and Nyikang, in his march from Akurwa to Fashoda is supported by Gol Dhiang. *Piel*, literally "homestead," and a word used to describe the smallest domestic unit of Shilluk society, here merely means "home" or "country of." The origin of these two divisions is historical and the names themselves have no direct connection with the ceremonial opposition displayed during the installation. The two ceremonial divisions do not correspond exactly (though nearly) with similar divisions, Gerr and Lauk, which have a periodic significance in quite another context[2]. At Debalo, the *reth* remains in strict seclusion for three days, guarded by day and night, and the village is not open to anyone who is not a personal attendant or from the divisions of Gol Nyikang. The belief that he is in danger is expressed in a number of ways, including the lighting of fires all round the village at night and the fact that although a special house is built and most carefully decorated in the royal manner to receive him, he actually sleeps in one of the more dilapidated and less conspicuous houses.

[1] See Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 139.

[2] Howell & Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 75 (I).

24: Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

purpose. Secondly, it was clear that many persons from the southern Shilluk assumed that he would remain there for at least three nights before proceeding to Fashoda and were therefore too late to attend the ceremonies.

I reached Kwom, near Debalo, on the morning of the 6th February. At that early hour there was little activity, though many of the *reth*'s followers were to be seen clustered round Debalo. There followed the usual delay while *kwa* Ojal, the clan whose duty it is to provide a heifer which is led backwards in front of the *reth* as he leaves for Fashoda," were still arguing about the number of spears and other articles they should receive as their reward; *kwa* Okelo who provide *Nyakwer*, the " girl of the ceremonies," who accompanies the *reth* and plays such an important part in the installation, were also late. Finally, towards midday, all was ready. Messengers had arrived to say that Nyikang was on the move, and after stepping over the bull and the performance of the usual ritual associated with this occasion, the *reth* and his company set out for Fashoda. I watched the procession depart and as far as I could make out the formation of the bodyguard and the position of the clans was the same as in 1944, though a great deal less orderly in the initial stages of the journey. Since Mr. J. C. N. Donald (who had attended the installation of *reth* Anei and of *reth* Dak) and Mr. Udal were present, I decided to leave the *reth*'s party and to motor northwards to follow the army of Nyikang. Mr. Udal has recorded the details of the *reth*'s march as follows:

" In fact it was not until nearly 12.30 p.m. that the procession finally set off to meet the forces of Nyikang. The *reth* appeared wearing a Mrs. Grey antelope skin surrounded by his family entourage including *Nyakwer*, her luggage carried on a retainer's head and the shield-bearer carrying the small shield of Nyikang wrapped in white cloth. In addition to his own police in their scarlet *laws*, the *reth* on his own initiative had arranged that the two Government police, stationed at Debalo for the occasion, should escort him and they accompanied him throughout the ceremonies. A bull was efficiently cast for the *reth* to step over and with that the procession moved off at a brisk pace. There was no stop for refreshments at the merchant's shop at Kwom which had been honoured by *reth* Anei on his way to the installation in 1944. Not until the *khor* Arepejur was reached did the cavalcade, deployed in extended line, come to a halt.

" The time was now about 1 p.m. On the northern bank of the watercourse the forces of Nyikang could be seen drawn up in wide formation and the effigies stood out distinctly at some quarter of a mile's distance. Two messengers from Nyikang were waiting in the bed of the watercourse, and the black bull, over which the *reth* must step, was also in evidence. A brief conversation was held with Nyikang's messengers who then returned to their master. In the meantime singularly inadequate attempts were made to cast the black bull, which delayed the proceedings by eluding its captors and running away down *Khor* Arepejur, from which it was only retrieved with difficulty. Finally it was well and truly cast, and the *reth*'s forces crossed the watercourse with much shouting and advanced to meet the forces of Nyikang."

[1] See Howell and Thomson, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-53.

24: Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

643 by the *ororo* and *bwarok* of Fashoda, a ceremony which I did not attend, though I had seen it done at the installation of *reth* Anei.

If there are any observations to be made on this day's events, they are that the whole occasion was carried out in a much less serious manner than previously. The participants appeared to be light-hearted and the dangers to the *reth*, though carefully stressed, were obviously not taken so seriously. If there is any explanation of this, it is probably that the Shilluk, who have undergone the very real strain of no less than three installations in the last seven years, are now used to these events and do not regard them with such awe as before. It is also possible that Kur, as the son of a successful and popular father, was a candidate accepted with a greater degree of unanimity and calm than either of his two immediate predecessors. The number of participants seemed much less than before, possibly for the reasons already given, and because many people from the south were barred from coming owing to cerebro-spinal meningitis. One had the impression that the number of Nyikang's followers was much greater than those of the *reth*, no doubt partially due to the latter's unexpected decision to stay only one night in Debalo and the fact that this affected his own followers rather than those of Nyikang who had marched through the northern Shilluk. Also, perhaps, because Kur, as son of Fafiti, is popular in the north while he may be less so in the south.

I was not able to attend the final ceremonies. In the account by Mr. Udal which follows, it will be seen that *reth* Kur spent only one night up in the mound of *Atkurwic*, with the result that the ceremonies of installation from the point where he fled to Debalo had taken only five days instead of the customary nine.

THE FINAL CEREMONIES

(By J. O. Udal)

The Battle for Nyakwer

The *reth* was anxious to avoid any further delays and decided to spend only one night in *Atkurwic*. The battle for *Nyakwer* thus took place on the third day of the installation ceremonies, not on the fourth as is usual. I arrived at about 8 a.m. on the morning of the third day and was able to exchange greetings with the *reth* from a distance although he could not leave *Atkurwic: jago* Yorkiker *wad* Ajang thought that the battle would begin very soon, but the inevitable delays followed and it was not until about 9.15 a.m. that Nyikang's drum was heard being beaten in his shrine. The *kwe* Nyikwom began to assemble outside the shrine from which Nyikang and Dak soon emerged and with them *Nyakwer*, dressed in a Mrs. Gray antelope skin. *Nyakwer* is the central figure of the second battle. In the morning, the *reth*, remembering *Nyakwer*, whom he had forsaken for a girl of the *ororo*, sent for her. The news was brought that Nyikang had abducted her and an ultimatum was forthwith sent by the *reth* to Nyikang demanding her immediate return. Both sides then prepared for battle.

27: Munro U-5 (1918) 1918 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Observation here was very difficult owing to the curtain, the moving crowd, and the fact that the Ret's most ancient wife would keep on dancing in front of the only possible view.

I therefore moved my position to where I noticed some ancient cronies, who were past the age of reverence and merely inquisitive, and from which place one could see behind the curtain. Shortly after I had moved the Ret's waair was called for: he was Yomon wad Kor (Kwaniert). Nyakang was then withdrawn by his attendant backwards and the Ret took his seat on the sacred stool. His waair then grasped the two front feet of the stool presumably in token of the submission and fealty of the Shilluk race, and in recognition that Nyakang's mantle had descended upon him.

Then occurs much tomtoming and dancing, in which the people concerned are wives of the Ret and people of Akurwa, while the Ret sat like a graven image on the chair. At this time I noticed smoke issuing from the temporary table and asked what it was for. I was informed that the Ret's wives were warming water for the ablutions. Presently when this was ready two or three of them came and washed the new Ret's feet in hot and cold water, the significance of which is that the Ret shall be neither too cold nor too hot with his people, i. e. just.

The Ret was then lifted up by the Orore and carried to where a bull covered with a leopard skin had been brought by Kwa Ujalu[69] on the threshold of his temporary hut. He appeared to make certain passes, four in number, over this with a large sword, which was handed to him. The bull was then speared and carried away struggling for a short distance, and the Ret was then taken to his hut, which ended the proceedings temporarily. As we left the scene, the sacred stool was carried past us by four men running and taken up to the Ret's palace on the mound.

I was told Fafiti was to stay in his temporary hut for three days, and at the end of that period is taken up to his palace.

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[69] Kwa Ujalu is probably identical with Kwa Ajal, who were founded by Jal. They live at Ryal Wak and lay out the circle for building the house of Nyakang (cp. Westermann, p. 108 clan list compiled by Rev. D. Oyler of Dehdeh Hill). Local tradition says they have the right given them by Nyakang of taking captive any girls they may meet and bedding them to reason.

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Chapter 1

WHERE IS KODOK?

I remember once reading a book, *Canada* I think it was called, the first chapter of which described the return from the South African War of the Civic Imperial Volunteers. In it one of the victorious heroes was asked by his admiring wife, "Where is Africa, Alf?", but alas, Alf didn't know. My ignorance, I fear, was similar to that of Alf when in 1939 I received an appointment to work in the Apostolic Prefecture of Kodok. Almost all that I knew of Kodok was that it was in the Sudan, and therefore somewhere in Africa; to that extent, at least, my knowledge was superior to Alf's. I did know where Africa was, but apart from that the name Kodok was just a palindrome, for it was the last and least of our missions, having been entrusted to the care of the Mill Hill Fathers only in the previous year, and the first band of five priests with Monsignor J. A. Wall at their head had but recently taken possession of the new field.

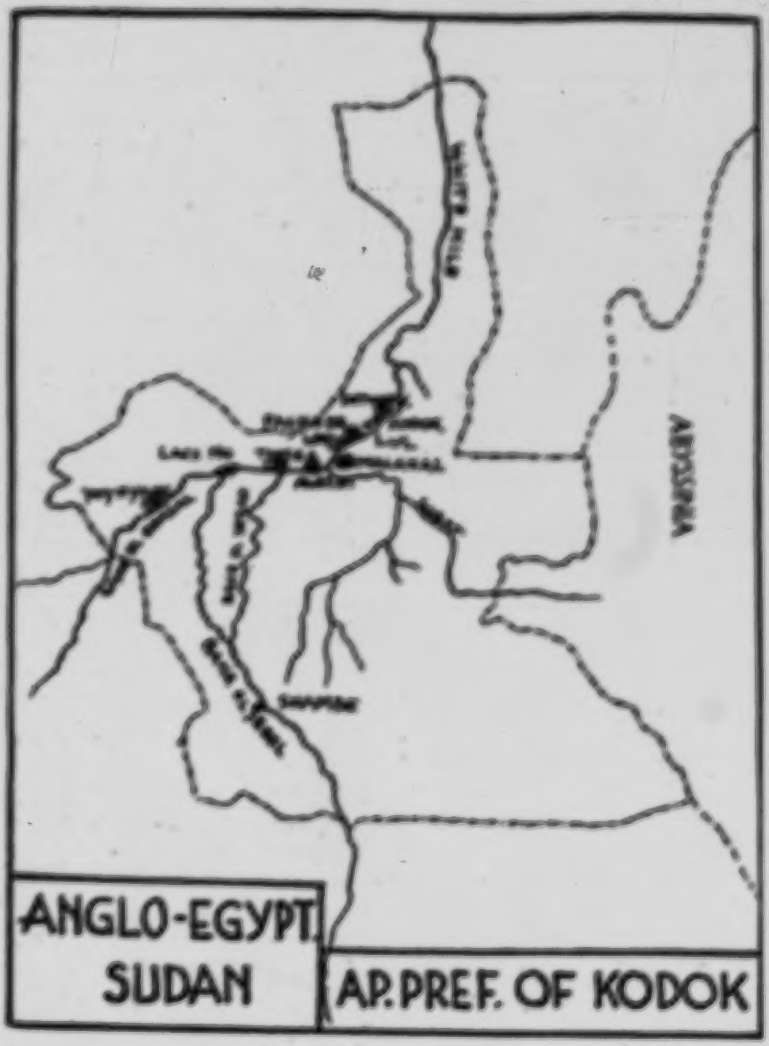
It was in December, 1939, that four of us set out to augment the original band of five, sailing in a wartime convoy for Africa. By this time I had learned a little more about the place. I knew, for instance, that it was the same place as Fashoda, famous in history as the meeting-place of Kitchener and Marchand and the scene of the 'incident' which nearly brought about war between France and England; that it was situated on the River Nile, 450 miles or so south of Khartoum; that it gave its name to an Apostolic Prefecture which theoretically covered a territory more than twice the size of Ireland, but in practice was confined to the land of the tribes dwelling on the river banks; that in the Prefecture there were already four mission stations established at Detwok, Lul, Tonga and Yoynyang by the Verona Fathers,

29:Dempsey M-S (1910-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

second- and third-class passengers and cargo, and around and behind were more cargo barges. Thus burdened, the *Rejaf*, travelling by night as well as by day, plodded along the river at a steady five miles an hour. A blast from its steam whistle signalled our approach to a trading station, and immediately all was bustle and excitement on the river bank. Merchants from the interior were there in force bringing in trucks, or loaded on camels and donkeys, quantities of produce for shipment, mostly grain. Humbler folk were there too, carrying the inevitable chickens and eggs, or perhaps dragging a protesting sheep or goat for sale to the crew. The whole bank was a mass of vociferous hagglers and squalling children, and if it were daytime, the water's edge would be lined with women washing clothes, the owners of which would be taking a dip in the river the while. Thanks to the hot sun and the stiff breeze this whole process of washing and drying takes less than ten minutes, which is an improvement on any patent soap-powder method, though it would be untrue to say that the clothes come out with the same dazzling whiteness. A few hundred yards from the river could be seen the village with its mosque built of sun-dried brick and its *suq* or market-place where one might find exposed for sale everything from dried dates to electric torches, and from soap (for which few seem to have much use) to murderous-looking swords and daggers. However, after an hour or so, all business completed, the steamer would back out into midstream, and the beat of its paddles soon lull us again to sleep as we lay in our deckchairs.

By the end of the third day we began to look around us with a quickened interest, for we had entered the Upper Nile Province which to us was synonymous with the Apostolic Prefecture of Kodok. We already knew our destinations, for we had found letters awaiting us in Khartoum appointing three of us to stations in the territory of the Shilluk tribe and the fourth to Yoynyang on the Bahr-el-Gazal (Gazelle River) among the wild and woolly Nuer. I was destined for Detwok, and so the small hours of the next morning found me packed and ready for departure, since I

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23



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had been warned that the boat would arrive at Detwok about 3 a.m. At last I heard the raucous hoot which was so often to rouse me from my beauty sleep during the coming years; I bade a quick farewell to the other Fathers who had

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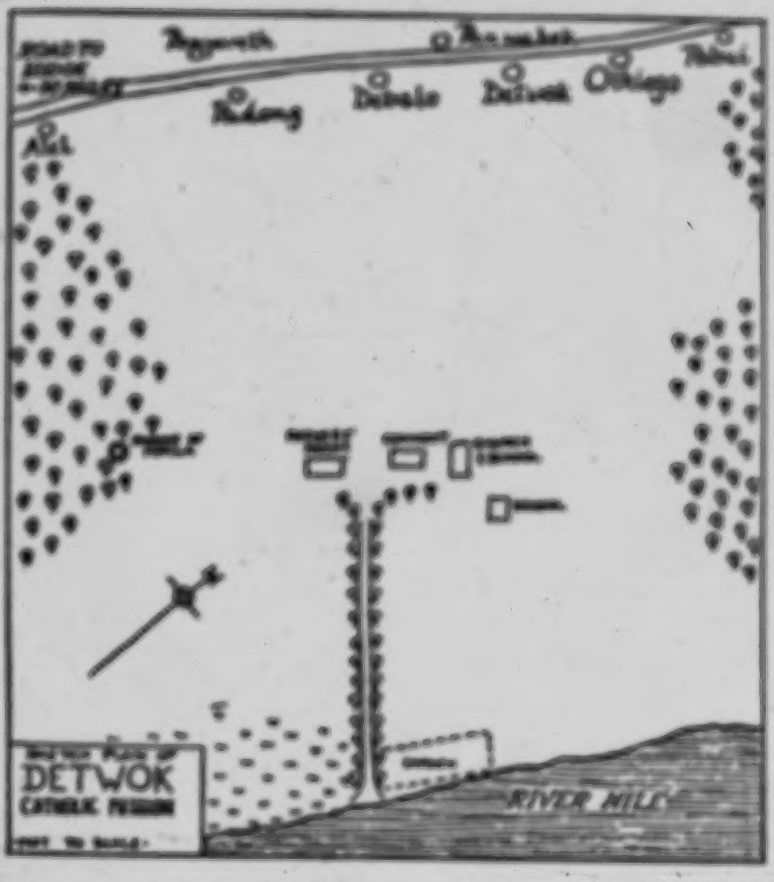
29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

797 come on deck to see me leave, and together with my luggage
129 I was bundled into the steamer's boat, rowed to the bank, carried through the deep mud on the shoulders of the boatman, and finally dumped on solid ground. Here I found Monsignor Wall who, after visiting Detwok, was returning to his headquarters at Malakal, and the Superior of the
123 Mission. Monsignor had just time for a word of welcome before he was carried to the boat I had just left and rowed across to the steamer standing out in midstream. The Superior and I turned, and by the dim light of a hurricane lamp made our way through the dark tunnel which led to the house. It was a ramp, half a mile long, built over the swamp and bordered with trees; at every yard I shied fearfully at writhing shapes across the path, only to gulp with relief on finding that they were not the snakes I expected but the roots of the trees. In the end there loomed up before us the shadowy bulk of the house that was to be my home for the next ten years. I had arrived.

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
F323 Shilluk F323



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last consolations of religion to these poor brethren of Christ. 997 763

After a month or so of my stay in Detwok I was happily settled in my new home, and was beginning to find my way about both in the district and—what was more difficult—in the Shilluk tongue. Although my activities were mainly confined to the classroom, occasionally I was able to escape from the trammels of schoolwork and spend a morning touring round some part of the mission. A morning of visiting 997 123

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
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would proceed somewhat in this fashion. I would plan an itinerary to take in half-a-dozen villages covering an area of two square miles or so, and from the mission books or my own notes decide on what had to be done. Augustine, living in Derwok, for example, had not sent in his pagan wife for instruction as he had promised; another gentle prodding would be necessary there. In Debalo I might find Julian, and it would be as well to investigate the report that he had begun negotiations for marriage with a pagan girl; I must find out how far matters have gone and how many head of cattle have been paid, and warn him to send the girl into the mission in good time so that she might be instructed and baptized and the marriage celebrated in church. Thomas in Palaia has inherited his brother's wife, so I had better look him up and find out what he intends to do about it. And while I am there I shall make a point of calling to see old Rachael, a good woman who has been ill for a long time now; she has already received the last Sacraments and is waiting for our Lord to call her from this weary world, weary indeed for her for she is a leper and blind as well; a few cheerful words and the gift of a screw of tobacco will help to relieve the tedium of a long day. In Othicngo there is another sick woman whom I ought to visit; the Sisters have been taking care of her and instructing her, as she is a pagan; perhaps it might be prudent now to baptize her. Also there is that young villain Paul who ran away from school last week; his father must be persuaded to send him back again. And that reminds me that in the next village lives Frederick, who assured the Superior that he would send his children to school, but has not done so; he must be given a sharp reminder of the duties of Christian parents towards their children. My list of calls thus planned, I pack my sick-call case into the cycle bag, break off a few pieces of native grown tobacco from a lump like a brick, and just as hard and appetizing looking, and stuff them into my pocket, mount my cycle and bump off across country towards the main road and the line of villages.

My entrance to the first village is greeted by a cacophony

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of frenzied barking, as all the mongrels in the place, suddenly galvanized into life at the appearance of a stranger, give tongue to their displeasure and make a concerted rush with the evident intention of tearing me to pieces. I shout to one or two youths loitering near and ask them to call off the dogs, but to no avail, so I seize a stick and get in a telling smack or two on some which have ventured too near, and disperse the rest with a few well-aimed lumps of cotton soil. They retreat to a safe distance barking and growling threateningly, but at least I can make my way into the village in peace. There is little astir; a few men squat near the cow byre gossiping while one lies prostrate on the ground with the village hairdresser anointing his hair with a mixture of red mud, oil and ashes as a preparation for building it up into an elaborate coiffure. Most of the women have not yet returned from their daily trudge to the river for water, but the spirals of smoke rising from behind the reed fences which surround the individual homesteads indicate that some of the more industrious housewives have already begun to prepare the morning meal. A group of small children, pot-bellied and large-eyed, soon run to surround the Father and his bicycle; gravely they scrutinize him and his mount while some shyly offer him the customary Shilluk greeting, '*Yi ki*—You have come'. The bolder spirits among them venture to come closer to investigate the wonder of his wrist watch, putting their ears against it to hear its ticking with smiles of amazement and delight.

The children follow the priest as he wheels his cycle across the open space to where the knot of idlers is sitting near the cattle byre. The village chief who is among them rises courteously to greet the white man; '*Jal dueng*,' he says, '*Yi nis*: Great one, you have slept.' I answer him in accustomed fashion, '*Yi nat*: You are here,' and then each man of the group greets me separately and receives his answer. I seat myself in the place of honour on the chief's mat and smoke a cigarette with him, discussing the prospects of the crops and making enquiries about certain ones in whom I am interested. Soon I excuse myself and go off in search of my

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errant sheep, Augustine, who has taken to himself a wife who is a pagan. Augustine is not be found anywhere; no one knows when he went away, where he is, or when he is likely to return. I think it very probable that he saw me coming, and at present is hiding in a neighbouring hut, but I know that it is useless to press the matter further now, so making a mental note to come back after a day or two, I retrieve my cycle with a sigh and, waving farewell to the chief, make my way to the next village on my list. Here, my welcome from the dogs is as noisy as ever, but my visit more successful. Julian is at home and admits that he has begun to pay cattle for the lady of his choice, yet asserts loudly and with an air of injured innocence that he would not dream of marrying outside the Church, and that he has only to point out to the girl the error of her pagan ways for her to begin instruction in the mission. This I take with a grain of salt, for I have heard it all before and know from experience that it will take months of patient and persevering persuasion before the bride-to-be presents herself to the Sisters to commence the learning of the Catechism. Still I must be satisfied with Julian's assurance, and taking leave of him I pop in to see Rachael.

The poor old lady is lying on a skin on the ground, her emaciated body covered with a dirty cloth. She seems to be dead already, but at the sound of the priest's voice she stirs slightly and turns her sightless eyes in my direction. I can see that she has grown much weaker since last I saw her, and that it can only be a matter of days till she goes to her reward, so I give her another blessing for the good of her soul and close her skinny claws round a piece of tobacco. Poor Rachael is too far gone to use or appreciate such a luxury, but she realizes that some one has given her something and is comforted by the possession of it. She tucks her gift away among her rags, for she knows that if her harridan of a daughter sees it she will take it from her as soon as her visitor has departed.

The round of visits continues. Paul's father is surprised to learn that his truant son has not been in school for the past

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week; he certainly has not been home, he says, and surmises that he has run off to the cattle camp across the river; he promises to investigate the matter in the morning, and the look in his eyes bodes no good for his errant offspring. In the case of the other missing schoolchildren I do not have the same success; Frederick is not at home, nor his boy; Cecilia, his wife, says that the lad is minding the sheep and goats and implies that he will have to go on minding them as there is no one else to do it. (The flock actually minds itself to the ruin of the Sisters' garden, while the false shepherd disports himself in the river.) As to little Amelia, she is wanted at home to look after the baby, so she can't come to school either. I give this up as a bad job and push on to work through the remainder of my visits. Once or twice I am called into a hut to look at someone who is sick, and if I judge that he or she is sufficiently ill to warrant the attention of the Sisters, I make a note of the name and place. In one hut I find a tiny baby obviously very ill, so while the mother anxiously looks on, I baptize it, giving it the name Angela. (I learned that evening from the Sisters that little Angela had died, and I felt happy that I had been instrumental in speeding her flight to join the angel choirs above.)

But now the last of the calls is made, and, accompanied by the ever unfriendly dogs, I make my exit from the village and take the track leading to the main road. In the distance I hear the mission bell ringing out the mid-day Angelus, and saluting the Mother of God as I ride, I quicken my speed towards the mission house and lunch.